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Commencement Address - Morris Harvey College in Charleston, West Virginia

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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May 16, 1975

1. The North Atlantic states have a continuing need for mutual assurance. Their destinies have long been interwoven and can be expected to remain so. As a concept, therefore, the North Atlantic Treaty and the commitments for mutual assistance thereunder remain a completely valid basis for U. S. policy.

The NATO military bureaucracy, however, is another matter. Its structure was designed shortly after World War II. In my judgment, in form and size the organization has become increasingly irrelevant to contemporary needs. The beginning of its antiquation dates at least since the withdrawal of the assigned French forces years ago. NATO needs a gradual redesign in the direction of less dependency on U. S. military deployments in Europe. I do not think, moreover, that the medium for bringing about such a re-organization is to be found in the talks on mutual force reductions with the Soviet Union. How long have they been going on? And with what results? Personally, I favor cutting the U. S. deployment at least in half, with reductions phased over several years and in consultation with other NATO allies.

2. At first glance, it may seem otherwise, but the "deterioration" in the situation of which you speak bears little if any relationship, in my judgment, to the present level of American forces stationed abroad. I will continue to seek a reduction in the number of U. S. troops in Europe and elsewhere as I have been doing for a decade or more. When and how to press for reductions by legislative action, however, involves many additional considerations.

3. All three factors are involved.

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4. We are passing through difficult times in the United States but I would not describe this nation as being in a "decline," a word which has a hint of irreversibility.

5. The President and the Executive Branch have spoken of "reassessment" of policy, particularly in regard to the Middle East. I would apply the term to all aspects of U. S. policy and I would like to see the entirety kept under continuous review.

6. Congress is not "challenging" the Administration's conduct of foreign policy. Rather, it is trying, by and large, to make a constructive input on policy in order to shape it more in accord with realities both at home and abroad. That should not confuse American allies nor encourage American adversaries.

7. Personally, excellent. Frequently.

8. The trend seems to be in that direction but in the end the responsibility lies with the Executive Branch.

9. A healthy disarray is the usual state of Democratic party politics a year or more before a Presidential election. At this point, I have no inside information regarding the next candidates for the Presidency. In politics in the United States, there are few, if any, certainties.

Thank you.

1. President Ford will soon travel to Europe where he will reaffirm the American commitment to NATO. In your opinion, what is the present condition of the Atlantic Alliance?
2. During the past year NATO has been beset by serious problems--Cyprus, Turkey, Greece, Portugal, and differences over Middle Eastern policy. At the same time, detente has suffered some setbacks and U.S.-supported regimes in Southeast Asia have been defeated.
In light of these events, will you continue to advocate a substantial reduction in the number of American troops in Europe and elsewhere overseas? Would such reductions not risk a further deterioration of the world situation from an American point of view and encourage isolationist tendencies in the U.S.?
3. Have you proposed troop (American) reductions in Europe due to budget considerations, the absence of an immediate, clear Soviet threat, of a desire to encourage the Europeans to assume a greater defense burden and increase European cooperation?
4. Many Europeans believe the U.S. has entered a period of political, economic, and military decline and increasing domestic social conflict. What is your opinion of such pessimistic judgments?
5. Secretary of State Kissinger has spoken of the need to "reassess" American policy in all parts of the world. How, in your opinion, should the U.S. reorient its foreign policy?
6. The Congress has demonstrated increasing determination to challenge the Administration's conduct of foreign policy. Will this confrontation increase in the wake of the debacle in Southeast Asia? Could this not confuse American allies and encourage American adversaries?
7. Could you describe your relationship with the President and Secretary of State? How and how often do they consult with you concerning major foreign policy actions?
8. Do you foresee new American initiatives (diplomatic) with the People's Republic of China, Cuba, in the Middle East?
9. A final question of great interest in Europe: The Democratic Party seems to be in some disarray, while several members--most notably Senator Jackson--are already competing for the 1976 presidential

nomination. Who, then, do you think will be the opposing candidates in November, 1976? And are you certain that, in the end, Senator Kennedy will not accept the Democratic nomination if none of the other candidates obtain a majority of Democratic support?